Democrats Press Administration for Records on Iraq Relations

By George Lardner Jr.
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Two leading House Democrats stepped up pressure on the Bush administration yesterday to disclose more about its prewar courtship of Iraq.

Rep. Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.), chairman of a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee, called for public disclosure of 93 classified documents, which he said would show how the Bush and Reagan administrations "pampered" Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in the mistaken notion that they could thereby control the situation in the Middle East.

The records, most from the State and Defense departments with a smattering from the National Security Council and the Commerce Department, were selected from thousands reviewed by Gejdenson's subcommittee on international economic policy and trade last year as part of an investigation of U.S. exports to Iraq of sensitive equipment and technology.

Citing what he called one "mind-boggling" example of the continued U.S. tilt toward Iraq, even after the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran ended in 1988, Gejdenson said the NSC decided later in 1988 to give more favorable treatment to export license applications from Iraq.

Gejdenson said at a news conference that publication of the documents he wants might "embarrass" the administration, but he said he was sure it would not damage national security. Among the records Gejdenson is seeking to make public is National Security Decision Directive 26, which Bush signed in October 1989 calling for closer economic and political ties with Iraq in the interest of moderating Iraq's behavior.

In a separate announcement, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jack Brooks (D-Tex.) said his panel would hold a hearing June 2 to consider requesting appointment of an independent counsel to investigate the Bush administration's assistance to Iraq before the Persian Gulf War.

"Numerous stories in the media over the past several weeks, as well as several congressional committees, have brought forward information suggesting that administration officials, including several members of the Cabinet, carried out a conscious policy of aiding the regime of Saddam Hussein right up to the day he invaded Kuwait" in August 1990, Brooks said. "Some disturbing information has surfaced suggesting that this officially sanctioned policy may have gone so far as to involve violations of federal criminal law."

Under the Ethics of Government Act, the attorney general is required to conduct a preliminary investigation if he receives information that high-level administration officials "may have violated any federal criminal law." The Judiciary Committee of either house can trigger such an inquiry by formal request, although the final decision is up to the attorney general.